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UNCLAS TEGUCIGALPA 000692

SIPDIS

STATE FOR IIP/G/WHA (CBARONE; GLLOYD); IIP/T/SV; WHA/PDA
(MBUCKLEY); INL/PC (RTHOMPSON)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: EVALUATION OF U.S. SPEAKER FOR BLACK HISTORY MONTH,
DENNIS WATLINGTON, TRACKER #18210

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 361

1. Dennis Watlington, March 1-10, 2003. Post celebrated Black History Month (African-American Heritage Month) through film showings, meetings with youth about the possibility of a productive life following recovery from drug use and gang violence, and discussions of cultural, historical and social contributions of African-Americans to American society. Impact was outstanding. The universities provided the venues for their programs.

2. Filmmaker, writer, actor and director Dennis Watlington is a tireless speaker who tailored his presentations according to the audience, interspersing the showings of his Emmy Award-winning documentary, "The Untold West: The Black West," with anecdotes from his own life from Harlem to Hollywood to deliver the message that "poverty and drugs are not a death sentence, but a lack of education is." He presented his audiences in nine different program venues and four cities with a new perspective on Black History, discussing the role played by slaves and freed Black Americans in settling and developing the West, speaking along the way with academic and cultural contacts, representatives of Garifuna (Afro-Honduran) NGOs, students and professors from the English Departments at two universities, the media, the general public and local filmmakers and reaching thousands during his six-day program. The highlight of his program was meetings with hundreds of young people, among them high school students, recovering drug addicts and former gang members, and young leaders from Garifuna and other North Coast communities who are working as mentors with kids at risk in their communities. During these inspiring programs, Mr. Watlington talked about his personal story of recovery from drug addiction and an early adolescence spent in gangs. His extremely warm personality, openness and good humor made the audience frequently interrupt with applause and more than made up for his lack of Spanish. He is an articulate, dedicated, engaging and hard-working man, who devoted tremendous energy and thought to bringing a message of the benefits of diversity and the possibility of hope through education to his audiences, commenting more than once that this was an "I'm proud to be an American" moment. The Post wholeheartedly recommends him for future programming.

3. PAS Tegucigalpa thanks CAO David McGuire in PAS Managua for suggesting Dennis Watlington as a speaker and appreciate the usual excellent work of IIP/G/WHA Camille Barone and Gloria Lloyd in facilitating financial arrangements.
Palmer